



Media Release

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON
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Proposed Active Living Centre project: Frequently asked questions

Last week, City Council directed Administration to move forward with a City of Vernon referendum for the proposed Active Living Centre, in conjunction with the 2022 municipal election. Information on the [planning process](#) for the project was then shared with the community.

To help residents learn more about the proposed project, the amenities that are included in the conceptual design for the multi-use facility, and how the funding process would work, the City is providing a list of frequently asked questions that have been raised throughout the public and stakeholder engagement processes related to the Greater Vernon Recreation Master Plan and the Greater Vernon Active Living Centre Feasibility Study.

Greater Vernon Recreation Master Plan engagement

The Recreation Master Plan was developed between January 2018 and October 2018. It was designed to help guide Greater Vernon Recreation Services in the provision of recreation space and opportunities for years to come. It was built upon input and engagement from the citizens of Greater Vernon and under the guidance of decision makers from throughout the Greater Vernon area.

The general public, as well as a number of community stakeholders and partners, were involved throughout the development of the Master Plan. Some of the engagement activities included: receiving nearly 2,200 survey responses from various survey methods (controlled access; open access; student-specific; stakeholder-specific); public meetings; in-person interviews with 96 individuals representing 56 organizations; online engagement; community events; and questionnaires.

The Master Plan notes that the level of engagement from that planning process far exceeded levels experienced by the consulting team in other communities.

Greater Vernon Active Living Centre Feasibility Study engagement

The Active Living Centre Feasibility Study was conducted between August 2019 and May 2020. The goal of the study was *“to find an indoor facility mix that meets the current and future needs of a growing community and has the opportunity to attract new residents and visitors to the*

Greater Vernon area.” One of the guiding principles of the study was to design a facility that would accommodate the everyday needs of the community and have the ability to host events.

Engagement activities for the Feasibility Study included: an Elected Officials workshop; a direct mail random sample survey; an open house; three online surveys – one of which specifically sought input from youth; six focus groups that included 86 participants representing more than 20 user groups; and 10 pop-up events.

On the following pages, you will find a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) that came from the engagement activities noted above. The City of Vernon will continue to provide information on the proposed Active Living Centre project over the next several months, and will update the [City’s website](#) when new information is available.

Residents are encouraged to visit the [Active Living Centre information page](#) on a regular basis, and follow the City on its social media channels (@CityofVernon) on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) to learn more about the project, the referendum process, and how City of Vernon residents can participate.

Frequently asked questions about the proposed Active Living Centre

Has a Master Plan and needs assessment been conducted for Greater Vernon recreation facilities?

Yes, the Greater Vernon Recreation Master Plan was conducted by RC Strategies + PERC between January and October of 2018. The Master Plan was endorsed by all the elected officials in Greater Vernon in October 2018. The extensive public engagement and results of the Master Plan can be [found here](#).

The Greater Vernon area includes: the District of Coldstream, Electoral Areas B and C, and the City of Vernon.

Was a feasibility study conducted for the Active Living Centre project?

Yes, the Greater Vernon Active Living Centre Feasibility Study was conducted by FaulknerBrowns Architects between August 2019 and May 2020. The extensive public engagement and results can be [found here](#).

What facilities did the Recreation Master Plan and the Feasibility Study identify as priorities for the community?

The Recreation Master Plan identified the following facilities as priorities (listed in order of priority):

- a leisure swimming pool
- an indoor walking/running track
- fitness/wellness facility
- a 50-meter pool

A potential action identified in the Master Plan was to *“develop an additional indoor aquatic facility considering both leisure and competitive components.”*

The goal of the Greater Vernon Active Living Centre Feasibility Study was *“to find an indoor facility mix that meets the current and future needs of a growing community and has the opportunity to attract new residents and visitors to the Greater Vernon area.”* One of the guiding principles of the Feasibility Study was to *“design a facility that would accommodate the everyday needs of the community and have the ability to host events”*.

The statistically valid results of the controlled direct mail survey that was part of the Feasibility Study indicated that the aquatic priorities were (in order of priority):

- a 50-meter pool
- a secondary warm pool
- a leisure pool

The ‘dry’ indoor priorities were (in order of priority):

- a walking/running track
- fitness centre
- multi-purpose rooms
- gymnasium

How does the aquatic facility in the Active Living Centre accommodate the everyday needs of the community and the ability to host events?

Through the public and stakeholder engagement process, it was determined that having a 50m pool with moveable bulkheads would provide the desired goal of accommodating the everyday needs of the community, while also having the ability to host events.

Having the ability to move the bulkheads into configurations that can create two (2) 25m pools, or three (3) areas of varying size (e.g., 12.5m, 12.5m, 25m), would provide increased programming opportunities. It is anticipated that the 50m pool would be used in the two 25m pool configuration, or the three areas of varying size configuration, the majority of the time.

As an example: lane swimming can be taking place in one area of the pool, while the other areas are set up for public swim, aquatic exercises, or swim lessons.

Rather than having a leisure pool with fixed amenities like a wave pool, or wave rider features that tend to lose their appeal after time, it was determined that using one of the 25m halves with features like a rock-climbing wall, water walking mat, rope swing, etc. – along with portable amenities like the floating Wibit, brought out on a rotational basis – would be a more effective and efficient, but fun alternative. As such, the proposed pool is a versatile pool that can be used in a variety of ways, including hosting competitions.

Why has a 50m pool been proposed and not a second 25m pool?

As part of the Recreation Master Plan process, a needs assessment was completed by RC Strategies + PERC. At that time, it was determined there was a short term/high priority need (0-5 years) to “Enhance the quality and quantity of indoor aquatic facilities” in Greater Vernon.

A 50m pool was identified by the public, through the needs assessment, as one of the top four indoor facility priorities. The Feasibility Study supported that finding and concluded that the best way to meet the identified need was to build a single 50m facility rather than operate two separate 25m facilities. This was, in part, due to the feedback from the public that they would prefer that there be only one Aquatic Centre, estimated savings of more than \$300,000 per year to operate one 50m pool as opposed to 2 – 25m pools, and the increasing costs to maintain the aging Vernon Aquatic Centre.

How many meters of water do communities of similar size have?

As the Vernon Aquatic Centre serves not only the Greater Vernon area, but also the broader Regional District of North Okanagan, the population of the Regional District has been used in the following comparison.

City/District	Population	Pools	18m	25m	37.5m	50m	Total m
New Westminster	78,900	1				1	50
North Okanagan	87,591	1		1			25
District of North Vancouver	88,168	3		2	1		87.5
Prince George	89,490	2		1		1	75
Victoria	91,867	2		1		1	75
Chilliwack	93,203	3	1	2			68
Kamloops	97,909	3		2		1	100
Nanaimo	99,863	2		1		1	75

How does the proposed Active Living Centre meet the current needs of our population and future usage?

As part of the Recreation Master Plan process, a needs assessment was completed by RC Strategies + PERC. At that time, it was determined there was a short term/high priority need (0-5 years) to “*Enhance the quality and quantity of indoor aquatic facilities*” in Vernon. The Feasibility Study supported that finding and concluded that the best way to meet that need and provide the community with 25 more meters of water was to build a single 50m facility rather than operate two separate 25m facilities.

The Master Plan also identified a mid-term/mid to high priority need (6-10 years) for non-school based gymnasium spaces, enhanced quality and quantity of dedicated programming spaces, and fitness and indoor walking spaces.

Given that the Master Plan was completed and endorsed in October 2018, the short-term time period would be 2019-2023, mid-term 2024-2028, and long term 2029-2033. Should the referendum be successful in October 2022, the proposed Active Living Centre could be open by the fall of 2026; directly in the middle of the mid-term time period.

Facilities have an anticipated 50-year life cycle and need to be built large enough to accommodate both the current needs of a community, and the anticipated future needs of a growing population.

Is there an anticipated increase in use of the proposed Active Living Centre?

The opening of a proposed Active Living Centre is potentially three to five years away. The North Okanagan has already reached the population that was projected for 2026, just three years ago in the Regional District of North Okanagan’s Growth Strategy Report. It is anticipated that with the expected continued population growth in the North Okanagan and a new facility likely to attract new users, the number of user households will increase substantially.

What is the breakdown of users from Greater Vernon, the broader Regional District of North Okanagan, and Others, in the existing Recreation Centre?

A report generated through the *Xplor* recreation software program (as of 2022) using postal codes indicates there are 6,600 households with accounts accessing Recreation Services. The ‘Other’ category includes households outside of the Regional District of the North Okanagan including Salmon Arm, Lake Country, and Falkland. The breakdown of households is as follows (*note this is only households with accounts and not individuals that choose to pay a daily drop-in fee*):

• Vernon	3,903	59.1%
• Coldstream	1,006	15.2%
• Others	458	6.9%
• Area B	329	5%
• Armstrong & Spallumcheen	310	4.7%
• Area C	269	4.1%
• White Valley (Lumby, Area D & E)	211	3.2%
• Enderby & District	114	1.7%

Since the larger population of the Regional District utilizes the existing Vernon Recreation Centre and is mentioned in the reasoning to support the scale of the project, have jurisdictions outside of Vernon been approached to participate in the proposed Active Living Centre project?

The City of Vernon asked the District of Coldstream and Electoral Areas B and C – as funding participants in the Greater Vernon Recreation Facilities & Programming Agreement* – if they would like to participate in the proposed Active Living Centre project and a borrowing referendum in October 2022. In April 2022, the District of Coldstream and Electoral Areas B and C notified the City of Vernon that they have declined to participate in the Active Living Centre project, as proposed.

Additionally, the City has made presentations to White Valley Parks, Recreation & Culture, the Village of Lumby, City of Armstrong, the Township of Spallumcheen, and the City of Enderby, and invited them to participate in the project through Fee for Service Agreements.

**The existing Vernon Aquatic Centre is currently operated within the terms of the Greater Vernon Recreation Facilities & Programming Agreement and is supported by contributions from the District of Coldstream, Electoral Areas B and C (combined contribution of 31.6%), and City of Vernon (contribution of 68.4% of budget).*

What is the estimated cost to build the proposed Active Living Centre?

As part of the Feasibility Study completed in May 2020, the cost of the full build out of the proposed Active Living Centre, including a 50m pool, a leisure pool, a fitness centre, a walking running track, two gymnasiums, multi-purpose rooms and associated support amenities like a lobby, change rooms and storage spaces, was estimated at \$90M, which included design, professional fees, construction, and contingency.

Construction costs and supply chain issues are having a significant impact on large scale project cost estimates. Recent reviews by two independent Quantity Surveyors estimated costs to increase in the order of 25-35% by 2023. The revised estimated cost of the full build out is now in the range of \$112.5M to \$121.5M.

What is the cost to the average Vernon tax payer for the Active Living Centre?

Tax impacts vary based on an individual's property's assessed value. To calculate the estimated tax impact on a specific residential property, take the property's total assessed value (land & improvements), divide it by \$1,000, and then multiply it by the tax rate.

The estimated tax rate for the City of Vernon to borrow \$121M for the construction and operation of the proposed Active Living Centre (based on 2022 figures) would be 0.47585.

As an example: The average assessed value of a property within the City of Vernon is \$620,994. Therefore: $\$620,994 \div \$1,000 \times 0.47585 = \$295.50 / \text{year} (\$24.63 / \text{month})$

What is the financial strategy for paying for the Active Living Centre?

At this time, the strategy is to ask the citizens of Vernon to support borrowing for the full cost of the Active Living Centre. The City of Vernon will pursue grant programs, private contributions, and fee for service agreements, as opportunities arise, in order to reduce the costs to citizens of Vernon.

Will grants be sought and to what extent?

Yes, all possible grant and donation opportunities will be explored to help reduce the overall cost of the project. Grant availability is subject to change and is often a matter of timing.

What are the costs for operating the current Vernon Aquatic Centre versus those of the proposed Active Living Centre Aquatic Centre?

The Feasibility Study completed in May 2020, indicated the existing Vernon Aquatic Centre (25m pool, leisure pool, fitness gym and support amenities) has annual net operating costs of \$605,301.

The proposed Active Living Centre Aquatic Centre (50m pool, leisure pool, 80-station fitness centre, and support amenities) would have annual net operating costs of \$1,274,372.

The annual operating costs for the full build-out of the Active Living Centre, including the double gymnasium and walking/running track and associated change rooms was estimated at \$1,426,763.

What is the expected percentage of cost recovery for the proposed Active Living Centre?

Recreation Services has averaged a 62% cost recovery for the operation of the Vernon Aquatic Centre for the past seven years. We anticipate achieving a cost recovery of between 55% and 65% for the proposed facility.

What will participants, who do not contribute to the project through taxation, pay for programs and services?

Vernon will be implementing a two-tiered benefit and fee structure that will favour those taxpayers that contribute to the project.

Taxpayers who contribute to the project through municipal taxes, will benefit from discounted fees and will be able to register for programs and classes one week before people that do not contribute through their taxes. This is a significant benefit to those taxpayers that support the project as programs, like swim lessons, are often at or near capacity.

Are there alternatives to the two-tiered benefit and fee structure?

Jurisdictions that wish their citizens to have equal access to the proposed Active Living Centre can enter into a Fee for Service Agreement with the City of Vernon. Individuals and families from non-participating jurisdictions will be able to pay an annual 'membership' fee in order to receive equal access to the proposed Active Living Centre.

What is the plan for the existing Vernon Aquatic Centre site if the Active Living Centre is approved?

The Feasibility Study recommendation is that once the new Active Living Centre is open, that the existing Vernon Aquatic Centre be decommissioned. Once the development of the proposed facility is underway, a feasibility study would be conducted to determine the best use of the interior space that is currently occupied by the Vernon Aquatic Centre. At least one prospective tenant has already provided a letter of interest to rent the Vernon Aquatic Centre space.

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